

The Challenge of Secular Humanism and Atheism Bill Muehlenberg

Secular humanism and atheism are major challenges to the Christian faith.

History and aims of Secular Humanism

In the late nineteenth century England, Thomas Huxley and other atheists sought to overthrow the cultural dominance of Christianity. Their goal was to secularise society, and replace Christianity with the “church scientific”.

Consider a major humanist document, “The Humanist Manifesto” (1933). Here are its first three points:

- **FIRST:** Religious humanists regard the universe as self-existing and not created.
- **SECOND:** Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and that he has emerged as a result of a continuous process.
- **THIRD:** Holding an organic view of life, humanists find that the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.

The fifteen point document was signed by 34 people, including educational reformer John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey actively pushed this worldview in the American school system. As Thomas Sowell comments, “Advocates of Secular Humanism have been quite clear and explicit as to the crucial importance of promoting their philosophy in the schools, to counter or undermine religious values among the next generation.” (Thomas Sowell, *Inside American Education*, 1993, p. 87)

Many academics have embraced this worldview and want to promote it actively. Consider the words of one postmodernist and secularist: “I, like most Americans who teach humanities or social science in colleges and universities, try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own.” (Richard Rorty, 1931-2007)

As a result, the majority of kids raised in a Christian home have lost their faith when they get through college.

The Humanists have continued their campaign, and issued more documents, such as “The Humanist Manifesto II” (1973). Here are a few of its claims:

“Traditional dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species.”

“Critical intelligence, infused by a sense of human caring, is the best method that humanity has for resolving problems.”

Then came “The Humanist Manifesto III” (2003). It says, in part:

“Humans are an integral part of nature, the result of unguided evolutionary change.”

“Humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.”

The new, militant atheism

There is a new, militant, vocal brand of atheism, as represented by Richard Dawkins, and his 2006 book, *The God Delusion*, and Christopher Hitchens, and his 2007 volume, *God is Not Great, How Religion Poisons Everything*.

These books have been bestsellers. Consider what was listed as the top five selling books in one Melbourne Bookstore on June 8, 2007:

1. *God is Not Great, How Religion Poisons Everything* by Christopher Hitchens
2. *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne
3. *Romulus, My Father* by Raimond Gaita
4. *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins
5. *Atheist Manifesto: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* by Michel Onfray

No wonder we are in such a mess, with such books being consumed so eagerly by so many.

The Biblical Response

There are at least three biblical responses.

One, we must agree with God in his estimation of the atheists: “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’.” (Psalm 14:1)

Two, we must provide honest answers to honest questions from the secularists and unbelievers: “Always be ready to give an answer for the hope that lies within you.” (1 Peter 3:15)

Three, we must remind them of God’s wonderful love and mercy: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

What then should we do, or as Francis Schaeffer asks, “How Should We Then Live?” He reminds us of the major worldview differences here: “Do we really understand that the biblical view of man and the secularist view are a total antithesis – and as such, they result in a totally conflicting view of human life, with totally different consequences?” (*The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 1984, p. 105)

Opposing the secularists and the spirit of the age will make us look like we have lost our marbles. Or as C.S. Lewis put it, “When the whole world is running towards a cliff, he who is running in the opposite direction appears to have lost his mind.”

We must have the right worldview and we must live it out, says Schaeffer: “As Christians we are not only to *know* the right worldview, the worldview that tells us the truth of what *is*, but consciously to *act* upon that worldview so as to influence society in all its parts and facets across the whole spectrum of life, as much as we can.” (Francis Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live?*, 1976, p. 256)

Conclusion

In the West we see the Judeo-Christian foundation being destroyed: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3)

-We must rebuild the foundations.

-We need to reclaim the Biblical worldview.

-We need to live lives of integrity, empowered by the Spirit, devoted to Jesus Christ, for the glory of God.